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EEFOEMER

now working at Me"dan who teach me a
hundred times more
than any drawing-room would teach me."

Again on April 18, when lunching with
Madame Zola at
Goncourt's, he was full of spleen, complaining
of a score
of worries, and notably of some plot, engineered
by sundry
members of the French Academy, to stop the
circulation of
" Pot-Bouille." He had now already begun to
write the
next instalment of the Bougon-Macquarts,
that is, "Au
Bonheur des Dames," but according to his
statements to
G-oncourt, this story really had no great
attraction for him.
He dreamt of undertaking some work which he
would never
be able to finish, he said, something which
would give
him occupation, and at the same time enable
him to retire
from the every-day battle without saying so —
for instance,
some colossal and endless history of French
literature. In
July that same year —1882 — when Goncourt,
Daudet, and
Charpentier were at Me"dan, Zola reiterated his
dissatisfac-
tion with " Au Bonheur des Dames." His
previous success
had spoilt his life, he declared; he would
never again be
able to write a book which would make as
much stir as
" L' Assommoir" or command such a multitude
of readers
as "Nana."¹
Writing to a friend a fortnight previously, he
had evinced

less pessimism. Indeed, though he referred to "Au Bon-heur des Dames" as a *tour de force* which would end by disgusting people "with the complicated state of French literature," he had expressed himself as being generally satisfied, and as enjoying the solitude in which he found himself at Me"dan, for it lent him great lucidity of mind. But it is certain that his nerves were overstrained, and that

¹ "Journal des Goncourt," Vol. YI, p. 209.